

REMARKS

Reconsideration of this application is respectfully requested in view of the foregoing amendment and the following remarks.

Claims 2-17 were pending in this application, of which claims 4 and 10-16 were previously withdrawn from consideration. In this Amendment, Applicants have canceled claim 3, amended claims 6, 8, and 17, and have added new claims 18-21. Accordingly, claims 2, 5-9, and 17-21 (and withdrawn claims 4 and 10-16) will be pending herein upon entry of this Amendment.

In the Office Action mailed January 4, 2005, the Examiner rejected claims 2, 3, 5-9, and 17 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as unpatentable over various combinations of German Patent DE 9417837 to Muller et al. ("Muller"), U.S. Patent No. 5,632,588 to Corey et al. ("Corey"), European Patent No. EP 180,050 to Brake ("Brake"), U.S. Patent No. 3,958,740 to Dixon ("Dixon"), and the newly cited U.S. Patent No. 3,805,943 to Warren ("Warren"). Specifically, the Examiner rejected claims 3, 8, and 9 based in part on Warren's teaching of the use of two grippers in order to transfer multiple objects simultaneously. In response, Applicants have amended claim 17 to recite a feature that is neither taught nor suggested by Warren or any other prior art of record. Therefore, to the extent the rejections might still be applied to claims presently pending in this application, Applicants respectfully traverse the rejections.

Applicants' representative wishes to thank Examiner Lowe for the courtesies extended during the telephone interview conducted April 19, 2005. In the interview, the Examiner agreed that the feature of transferring the same object between two gripping units would distinguish the

present invention over Warren. Accordingly, Applicants have amended claim 17 to clarify that the same work object is collected from beyond a first end situation along a beam by a first gripping unit, deposited by that first gripping unit at an intermediate storage, collected by a second gripping unit at the intermediate storage, and deposited by the second gripping unit beyond a second end situation along the beam. The present invention therefore passes the same work object between the gripping units of the single gripping mechanism moving along the beam. Applicants have also amended claim 8 to further emphasize this patentable feature. Support for these amendments can be found, for example, in the specification at page 9, line 28 to page 10, line 13 and in Figures 5A-5D.

In contrast to transferring the same object between gripping units, Warren merely teaches the picking up of a group of objects (*e.g.*, eggs) from a first location and the dropping of the group of objects at a second location. Each lifting plate 18, 20, 22, and 24 picks up a group of eggs moving on a framework 14, swivels on an arm over another conveyor 60, and deposits the group of eggs onto the conveyor 60. (Column 3, lines 10-16.) In this simple pick up and drop off operation, there is no transfer of eggs between the lifting plates 18, 20, 22, and 24.

The present invention's features of transferring the same object between gripping units and of simultaneously collecting and placing objects are also not taught or suggested by the other prior art of record. In the interview, the Examiner looked to Crorey as possibly teaching these features. Applicants note, however, that Crorey discloses a first workpiece transfer apparatus (Figure 2) that has two transfer devices 20, 22, each with their own gripping units 28, and a second alternative workpiece transfer apparatus (Figures 13-16) that has a single transfer device

with a single gripping unit 330. With the first apparatus, the gripping units 28 are not part of the same gripping mechanism and robot unit, and the gripping mechanisms do not move along a beam. With the second apparatus, there is only one gripping unit and therefore no object transfer between gripping units, and no simultaneous collecting or placing of work objects.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that amended claim 17 is patentable over the prior art of record. Applicants also respectfully submit that dependent claims 2 and 5-9 are also patentable due at least to their dependence on allowable claim 17.

Consistent with the amendments to claim 17, Applicants have also added new claims 18-21, which also recite the features of transferring the same object between gripping units and simultaneously collecting and placing objects. Applicants therefore respectfully submit that new claims 18-21 are patentable for the reasons discussed above in relation to amended claim 17.

Applicants have also amended claim 6 to correct matters of form.

Should the Examiner find a generic claim allowable, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of the withdrawn claims 4 and 10-16 directed to non-elected species. Applicants believe that at least claim 17 is generic. Upon reconsideration of the withdrawn claims, the Examiner is invited to contact Applicants' undersigned representative to discuss any amendments to the reconsidered claims necessary to conform to the amendments made to an allowed generic claim.

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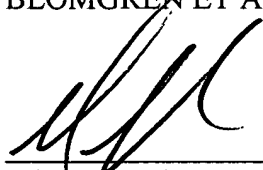
In view of the foregoing all of the claims in this case are believed to be in condition for allowance. Should the Examiner have any questions or determine that any further action is desirable to place this application in even better condition for issue, the Examiner is encouraged to telephone Applicants' undersigned representative at the number listed below.

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Respectfully submitted,

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